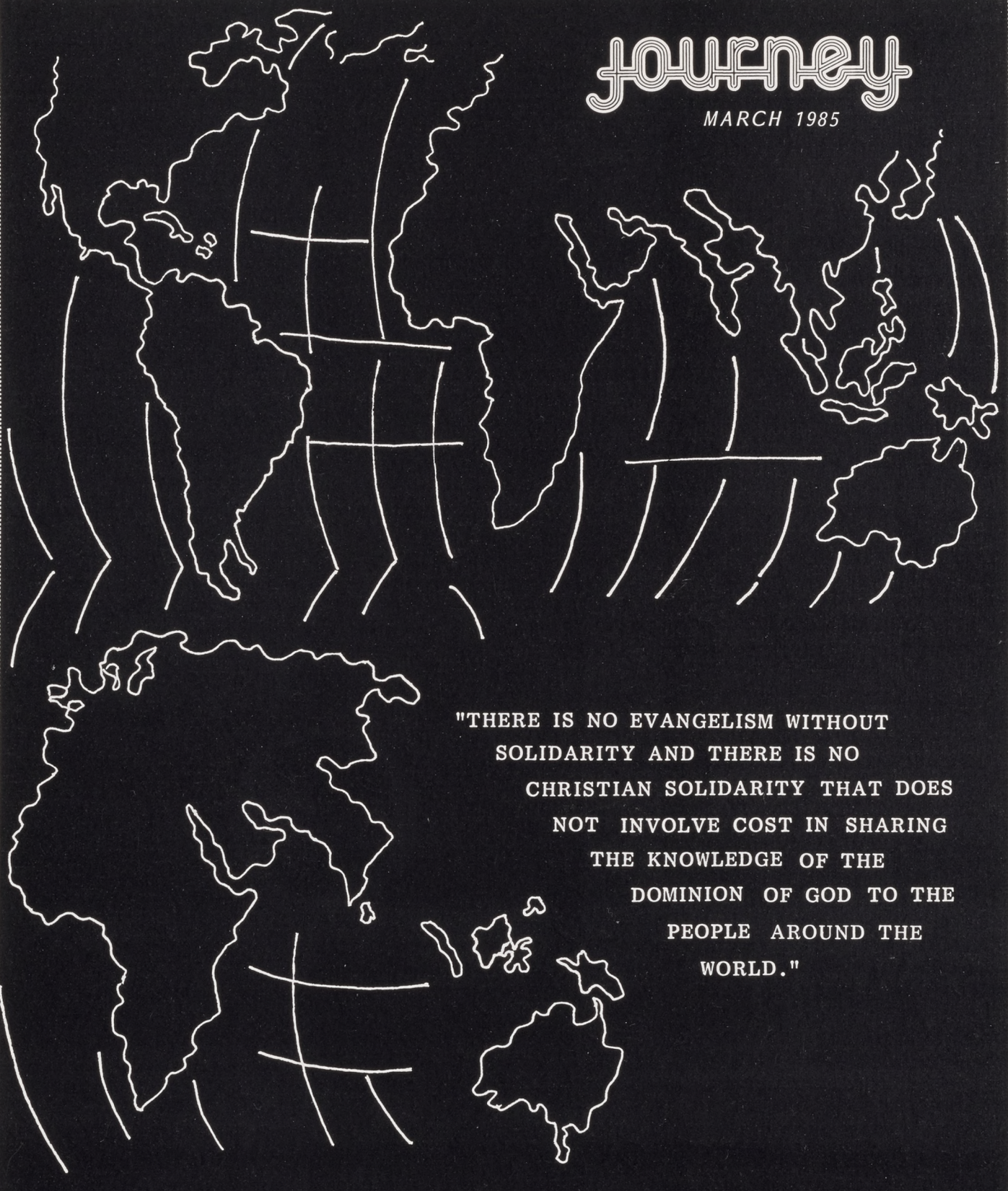
journey

MARCH 1985



"THERE IS NO EVANGELISM WITHOUT SOLIDARITY AND THERE IS NO CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY THAT DOES NOT INVOLVE COST IN SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE DOMINION OF GOD TO THE PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD."

World Church Extension

aids...

A Gay Man's Health Experience

PART VII
FRIENDSHIP
by Rev. Steve Pieters
Contributing Writer

Let's be upfront about this: writing concerning the subject of friendship is loaded with trite possibilities. And I confess to a sentimental, even romantic, view of Great Friendship. It has certainly been written about before, in song, story and first-person narrative essay form. So anything I say has probably been said before. Perhaps it's a cliche topic, because it bears repeating: friendship is one of the great themes of human existence. Particularly in the context of the aids crisis. Is it any wonder that one of the most popular and helpful programs for PWA's are the buddy programs?

One of the earliest, most powerful feelings associated with my diagnosis of aids was a sense of being totally alone in this experience. No one can go through this for me. I alone must face whatever rigors the dying process may have in store for me. The most loving person in the world cannot take away the dying.

Another sense in which I have felt alone is that I may die without ever knowing what it's like to have a spouse. This makes me feel angry, cheated and lonely. I sometimes get poignantly envious of happy healthy couples. I hear inspiring stories of a lover's devotion to an ailing PWA, and I panic inside that there will be no one there for me with that level of intimate caring and support.

My feelings about being so alone were confronted on a recent trip to Chicago. I got together with a college roommate who married his sweetheart and my first friend from freshman year, Maria. They have parented a houseful of designer children.

He said how sorry he was for all their friends who hadn't experienced the joys and blessings God had bestowed upon him and Maria in their happy home, with their abundant children. His pity for me in my situation got thicker before it got better. My anger at his intolerance of <u>any</u> alternative lifestyles snapped several things into place for me.

It became very important to resolve my feelings about my loneliness. I love a tortured ballad as much as anyone, but as a single person with aids, it's vital to get past the tragedy and celebrate the love that does exist in my life. Instead of dwelling on the loneliness of singlehood, I am choosing to concentrate on the joys of friendship.

In response to that in me which says, "You stupid jerk, you never had a lover," I now reply, "Who is my lover? These are my lovers--all my crazy friends!" My lover is not one person, but many friends. And they are truly an amazing cast of characters.

Each one of these special friends has been my "best friend" at one time or another. They each have provided me with some level of intimate contact, which I need right now more than ever. They are providing me the kind of strength and courage that I see other PWA's get from their lovers. Their love nurtures and sustains me. I believe that one of the main reasons I am doing so well is that my friends' qualities of caring have helped create the conditions for healing in my body and my soul. My experience of grace in this circumstance in my life is due, in no small measure, to the active love and joy my friends are showing me.

My local friends have been called upon to see me through very practical crises, like getting to the hospital for treatment when my car has broken down, or getting groceries for me when I was too sick to get out of my house. Some local friends have been good at engaging my mind, spending time with me, just keeping company and providing a sense of normalcy. My local friends are the people who are sharing the everyday experiences of aids. Many of them are relatively new friends. Most of them have only known me since I have been sick. I feel that they are the right people to be around me.

I have worked at building a support group around me here and I have done a successful job. I am pleased with the quality and the quantity of my relationships in Southern California. If anything, I am consolidating friendships, making choices about who I am spending precious time with. I am trying to focus and nurture the relationships in which I sense the opportunity for growth.

My recent trip east to Chicago and Boston put me back in contact with friends from other eras of my life. As I journeyed through my past via friends I have known for years, I discovered a keener sense of who I am. As I interacted with my old crowds, people who knew me long before my illness, I gained a sense of continuity, of belonging

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journey

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All materials submitted to JOURNEY must be inclusive of gender, age and race. The Editor will modify any language not meeting these criteria.

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COVER: Louis McLeod

World Church Extension

FREE TO SHARE

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

"Let us behave wisely towards those outside our number, let us use the opportunity to the full. Let our conversation be always full of grace and never insipid, let us study how best to talk with each person we meet." (Colossians Chapter 4, verse 5 and 6, modern version.)

There is no single way to witness to Jesus Christ. The Church has borne witness in different times and places in different ways. This is important. There are occasions when dynamic action in society is called for, there are others when a word must be spoken, others when the behavior of Christians one to another is the telling witness. On still other occasions the simple presence of a worshiping community or person is the witness. The different dimensions of witness to the One God are always a matter of concrete obedience. To take them in isolation from one another is to distort the Gospel.

They are inextricably bound together, and together give the true dimensions of evangelism. The important thing is that God's redeeming word be proclaimed and heard. Through Christ men and women are liberated empowered with all their energies and possibilities to participate in the sharing of the Gospel. Through Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, hope's salvation becomes realistic. Christ liberates from the prison of guilt, brings peace and wholeness to hurting people everywhere.

A common denominator in many of the letters that come across my desk from many countries of the world is the feeling of guilt and helplessness, rejection by society and Christians, especially since the advent of AIDS within our community.

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"ALIVE IN '85"

I keep hearing that commercial over and over as I drive from my home in West Hollywood to our denominational offices on Santa Monica Blvd. in Hollywood proper. Well, we who are a part of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches are alive, and it is 1985.

As perhaps you noticed, in January and February we did not publish an issue of JOURNEY magazine. Our cash flow was so acute that the Board of Elders made the decision to forego publishing the magazine for two months.

We are in the process, with our Editor, of finding ways to make the magazine less expensive to publish and yet keep it attractive as it continues as the official organ of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. We are in the process now of taking bids from several companies (this is being done by Ravi Verma, our Director of Administration) to have the magazine printed in more economical ways and to accurately and quickly report the news of all our churches.

We hope that you will bear with us as we move to make JOURNEY even more interesting for all of us.

Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry
Liaison Elder to JOURNEY.

Africa Fact Sheet

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FACT In Africa, 150 million people are severely affected by food shortages in a drought that extends to 24 countries. Famine conditions exist in numerous areas. The current famine has been called the worst of this century in Africa.

FACT The African famine is the most acute example of hunger that affects people throughout the developing world. As elsewhere, those people who are least able to grow or buy food suffer most when less is available.

FACT Since 1960, Africa is the only region where food production per capita has actually declined.

FACT 70 percent of Africa's people live in rural areas, and small landholders and agricultural laborers produce almost all food grown for consumption in Africa. The poverty of many of these producers accounts for much of the food production problem at the grassroots level.

FACT Health conditions and health care are worse in Africa than in any other region in the world. What is the impact on food production? A farmer in Nigeria is likely to be incapacitated 15-20 weeks of the year with malaria. Such tropical infections are most prevalent just after the rainy season, when harvests occur. Productivity lost to disease is very great.

FACT The United States provided $27 million in health aid to Africa during 1984, down from $42 million in 1981. Compare this figure, for the 188 million Africans living in countries where U.S. development aid is provided, to $40 million allocated to the 22 million people of Central America.

FACT Women perform some 70 percent of food production work in Africa, as well as most food production and child care. Yet women have usually been bypassed by traditional development aid projects, considered "consumers" rather than producers.

FACT Research and experience show that providing education for women is one of the most important steps toward reducing infant mortality and slowing population growth rates. Yet only 50 percent of African girls are enrolled in primary school, and girls are much less likely than boys to be in secondary school.

FACT Organizing into cooperatives for food production or health care, women in many communities are becoming more independent and productive, some aided by outside development aid.

FACT Changes in land use have upset relationships between people and environment by which many African people have survived for centuries. In some west African countries, use of land by European and U.S.-owned corporations to grow peanuts and vegetables for export has broken up the seasonal migration of pastoral people and their herds. As a result, sparsely vegetated areas are grazed too heavily, and the land becomes desert, incapable of producing any food.

FACT In international trade, the deck is stacked against Africa in the 1980 s. Total exports from African countries in 1982 earned only enough income to pay imports to Africa for 27 days of the year. One result: African countries accumulate growing debts in order to import food, fuel, military equipment.

FACT Annual per capita spending on the military increased from $18 to $22 (adjusted for inflation) for Africa as a whole during the 1970s, much more rapidly for Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Africa, Angola and Morocco. Spending on critical development needs such as health care, education and roads is substantially below the average for Africa in most of these countries.

FACT Military spending is encouraged by sales and aid from the United States, France, Israel and the Soviet Union. Indeed, while U.S. food aid to Africa was cut by more than a third from 1981 to 1983, military aid was more than doubled.

FACT Christians in the United States have fasted and prayed, studied and acted to influence their elected representatives on behalf of hungry people in Africa and elsewhere. Some results during the current famine:

— Ethiopia was reinstated as a recipient of U.S. food aid in July 1983.

— Congress has appropriated $150 million for emergency food aid for Africa. Congress went beyond the administration's request for $90 million when committee hearings confirmed Bread for the World's contention that more was needed.

— Congress has given preliminary approval for a new $25 million Child Survival Fund.

— The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved $90 million to complete the U.S. first pledge to the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD).

FACT African countries currently suffering food shortages or famine are Angola, Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sao Tome/Principe, Senegal, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Upper Volta, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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matter of prayer.

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NEW ZEALAND

During my visit to New Zealand, at the invitation of the Auckland Church, I realized just how fortunate many countries are in their laws. During my stay there the radio and television made announcements that AIDS had arrived in New Zealand. The laws there are against homosexuality, yet AIDS is a notifiable disease. This makes it very difficult for any person to go to their doctor and ask for help as they are almost admitting to a criminal offense by doing so.

Never has there been a time like this in New Zealand when we can bring the Good News of the Gospel to our community. So much help is needed there to combat the homophobia which is abounding at the moment. The church in New Zealand needs help to publish literature about the church and AIDS, to be able to make it available in all the major cities.

Maybe this is a project that the Lord could be calling your church to take to articulate the meaning of God's love in Jesus Christ for every person and for every situation. There are a group of people who would be willing to be part of an MCC in the city of Wellington, but as yet no one has come forward to lead that group. Maybe your church could make that a matter of prayer.

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The needs in Nigeria are very different from the needs of many countries where we are trying to bring the Gospel of liberation to all people.

The people in our Churches in Nigeria are poor and their needs are mainly practical. Rev. Maduka works very hard to reach the people of his country and needs transport to that job. At one time we provided a vehicle from the Fellowship for his work, unfortunately, it caught on fire. Rev. Maduka is desperately in need of transport to get around. Medical facilities are very scarce. Rev. Maduka's wife is going to do some training as a midwife so that she can be of some help where she lives.

I am sure that all of us have had our consciousness raised about the global nature of poverty in the world today, and as Christians we should try to think of ways and means to share the Gospel in a practical way. The "spiritual gospel and material gospel" were in Jesus, one Gospel. For all of us, the invitation is clear, to follow Jesus in identification and sharing with the poor and the weak because in them we encounter Christ.

HISPANIC AMERICAS

The Hispanic Americas ministry is going very well, we now have eight churches in that Extension area. The materials available in Spanish are "What is MCC?," "The Homosexual and the Bible," "Fellowship By-Laws" and "Christ Loves the Gays."

A new work in Tijuana began in November which is exciting news. The church in Mexico City has had to move from the place where they were meeting and the church now alternates between two meeting places. This caused a drop in attendance. They desperately need help to be able to purchase their own building. A building is available if they can find the money for the deposit.

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ple concerned with the laws of the country.

Greece is a country that seems to be opening up for us in recent months. Again, we have difficulties with the language. It takes me many hours of work translating the letters and answering them, and getting translations of parts of the Doctrines and By-Laws of our Fellowship to these people.

There is a lot of interest being shown in the Middle East, however, it is always a slow process. People are very intimidated by the laws of their countries in that area of the world and are fearful of doing anything that can bring them into contact with the law. Again, we need literature in Arabic languages. Interest is also being shown in the Virgin Island, Australia, Portugal, India, Japan and parts of Africa.

We now have translated into Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Polish, Chinese and Danish some literature. However, this is nowhere near enough. We cannot expect people to want to belong or to join a fellowship that they know nothing about. We need gifts to keep the World Church Extension office open in London, for translation, to open an office for the Hispanic Americas area, to pay a Church Extension Officer there and to bring trained people into some of the countries where there is a need for leaders.

There is no evangelism without solidarity and there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve cost in sharing the knowledge of the dominion of God to the people around the world. We want to spread the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ to every corner of the earth, to bring them the message of salvation and wholeness. Will you help us do that?

We thank you in World Church Extension areas for the help that you have given us during 1984 and we pray that God will lead you to give again during this coming year.

Sincerely, in the liberating Love of Christ,

Rev. Elder Jean A. White
Executive Secretary for
World Church Extension

fellowship news

our journey

FAMILY ACCEPTANCE COMES IN SPECIAL WAYS

The following letter was sent to Robert Shaw, Morningstar MCC, Worcester, MA, from his nephew, Sandy.

Dear Uncle Bob,

I really appreciated your honest and loving letter; I'm sure it was not an easy letter to write. I want you to know first of all that I certainly do still love you and accept you as you are, and I know that God too loves you and accepts you in Christ.

Thank you, Uncle Bob, for openly revealing your homosexual orientation; now we can relate to each other more honestly. Ever since you told me about your very close friendship with Phil two years ago, I have been wondering if you might be Gay, and when you talked about your active involvement in a Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination which I had heard ministered to Gay/Lesbian people, my wonderings increased.

I knew I would not feel right asking you specifically about it, but I kept wondering, so I'm thankful you took the initiative and answered my unspoken question for me. I told Nancy about your letter, but I will say nothing about it to the kids in the near future; they are too young to understand.

Even though our sexual orientations are different, you and I still have a number of things in common, Uncle Bob--our enjoyment of classical music and playing the piano, our love of flowers and the beauty of God's creation, our desire to help other people, our need of God's forgiveness, acceptance, and love in Christ, our hunger for fellowship in an active and loving church of God's people.

I hope and trust that our relationship of uncle and nephew will continue to deepen into one of mature, personal friendship and mutual encouragement in Christ over the years; I believed it has begun to do so already. Your letters have been so much more open, warm, and loving the last few years, Uncle Bob! I thank the Lord for the gifts God has given you in the areas of music, gardening, friendship, helping and Braille writing. It's wonderful how you are using these gifts to bring blessing to other people. Truly the life you are living is a valuable and worthwhile one, and the more you seek to do God's will as it is revealed in the Bible and to glorify Jesus in every area of your life, the deeper and more worthwhile your life will become!

Sandy

EXCEL

Please take advantage of the opportunity to attend one of these upcoming Excel weekends:

March 15-17 McKenzie Bridge, OR

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to many people's memories. As I noticed where I picked up this mannerism or that saying, I noticed things others had picked up from me. As I bounced off my friends of many year, I felt my self to be a full participant in life, which I have missed sometimes in my recent everyday existence. My old friends--my people, with whom I share a history--gave me a fuller sense of myself. I understand more of where I am going from seeing where I have come from...

I am really greatful for the presence of these people in my life! In Chicago I stayed with my Music Camp friend, Sarah. We celebrated her birthday for three nights and sang duets at the piano into the early morning hours. Matt flew down from his Northern Michigan Presbyterian pulpit and joined me and some of the old gang from Northwestern at a blues bar, which featured an aging Elvis-in-an-orange-polyester-jumpsuit. The zany, madcap bunch from Northwestern threw several parties. It was refreshing seeing all these people I haven't seen in over a decade. We turned out great! Many observations were made about how everyone just seemed to have become more themselves. And it was true. Nobody changed. They were just more so.

I have so many wonderful friends in Chicago. Sarah, my host: we've known each other over half our lives. The years of our friendship help me feel secure. Suzy is my Dorothy Parker/Sally Bowles "Bop Til You Drop" friend. She writes me extensive letters and keeps me vastly entertained. I love her. Bob and Steve I envied in college. They handled their homosexuality so much more easily than I. They just found each other right away, and it seemed to work. They were tortured about other things. They were together for about eight years, and are still friends. Elegant, witty, and vibrant, they both hold special places in my memories of my college crushes.

And Hope: we two Leos stir each other up. I care about her deeply. Our rare encounters leave me thinking, feeling and energized. A brilliant writer and actor, she can be as dramatic as anyone I know, and I love her for her passion!

So many other friends, and each one of them I feel could be my best friend. Many of them commented how healing it was for them to see each other again. They live around the city and don't see each other. Some of them are coming together again, taking care of their relationships. It is clear how important enduring friendships are when one member of the old crowd gets hit with aids. It gives me dignity and pride to think I might be part of the catalyst for people connecting with each other in a meaningful manner! It helps redeem my situation.

If Chicago was about reconnecting with my college friends, Boston was about my friends from childhood. I grew up in Andover, Massachusetts with a best friend named Sky Harrison. We lost touch with each other after I came out, and he got married. We got back in touch about four months before my diagnosis. He has been the best friend possible since then. Having built underground forts together as kids, it made me happy to spend several nights in the house he built on Cape Cod. A gently honest, striving friend, he's a straight man who loves a Gay man and doesn't know quite what to do with that, or even how to express it. But he does express it well. In some ways, nothing has changed between us since we were three years old. I love that man, my friend. And I was so relieved that I love his wife!

I spent idyllic time on the Cape, with the changing leaves at their peak. My cousins from upstate New York came to visit, and I revelled in their loving, positive energy. We lunched in Provincetown, and dined in Barnstable on clam chowder and boiled lobster. I spent another day with my friend Cathy, the former Nun, turned international flight attendant, turned suburban housewife and mother, turned chaplain and Roman Catholic feminist.

And my Episcopal priest Elizabeth took me home to Andover. By this time, I was dashing around saying hello to people. Sky's mother commented, "I hate the way you're doing this," as she gave me a long, warm hug. And I dashed on to see the house I grew up in. I was surprised that it didn't hurt to go home to Andover. I found out that I have already let go of that place, my "hometown."

I'm much more interested in people, my friends, my family. I ended this journey with a visit to my friend Sharon in Boston, and my brother, sister-in-law and niece in Squantum (can you believe there's a place called Squantum?). Sharon and I took a walk along the Charles. She cooked for me, baked for me, and fed me with real love.

I knew over coffee with Sharon that I will not die without knowing what it's like to have a lover. I have been loved by my friends in all the ways a lover can love. It is possible to be single and feel loved and not so alone.

SHARE YOUR "GOOD NEWS" WITH OTHERS

JOURNEY would like to feature some human interest stories in the future. Has some individual or group in your church gone out of their way to be of Christian service? Had a unique or interesting ministry? Deserve to be recognized for their selfless and giving attitude? Please let us share it with others. Submit material to: *JOURNEY* 5300 Santa Monica Boulevard, Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

"Look at the Metropolitan Community Church today – the Gay Church – almost accepted into the World Council... National Council of Churches. Almost. The vote was against them. But they will try again and again until they get in. And the tragedy is that they would get one vote. Because they are spoken of here in Jude as being brute beasts – that is going to the baser lust of the flesh to live immorally and so Jude describes this as apostasy. Thank God this vile and satanic system will one day be utterly annihilated and there will be a celebration in heaven."

From a Sermon on the TV Program "Old Time Gospel Hour" by Rev. Jerry Falwell, President, Moral Majority.

No, Jerry, that's not what Metropolitan Community Church is like because:

We are a caring, loving group of people.

We have created a 60-minute television documentary to confront those kind of lies, and others made by people like you who preach that we, as Lesbian and Gay males are brute beasts, not people.

Our documentary portrays the lives of women and men in the Gay community praying for and struggling to secure freedom and liberation for all people . . . teachers . . . Cuban Refugees . . . Third World People . . . persons with AIDS . . . Gay parents . . . the churched and unchurched . . . youth and seniors . . . sisters and brothers around the world who seek peace and prosperity. We have shared on tape the truth that spirituality and sexuality are compatible.

Mr. Falwell, I am asking my friends for help to show it like it is. I am asking them to please send their tax-deductible donations to me to get this message on the air. And it will be on the air because my friends care.

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A television presentation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

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